

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*



## Conservation Efforts Lead to More Than a Dream Lake

As a young boy, 71-year-old Benny Davis said he wanted his own lake. As a young man, Davis built his lake. Today, conservation experts say this boyish dream is benefiting many more people than the man who fulfilled his dream.

The year was 1968. Davis bought a 240-acre farm east of Corydon with land, he said, that was perfect to build a lake. There were deep ravines and gullies running through it to make building a lake easier.

Experts from the USDA Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), told Davis his dam would stop a lot of soil erosion. SCS helped Davis design and build his dam the next year. He soon had a 79-acre lake.



*Benny Davis stands in front of one of his small planes. While flying, Davis can see many of the hundreds of soil conservation structures he built in Wayne County over a 40-year career.*

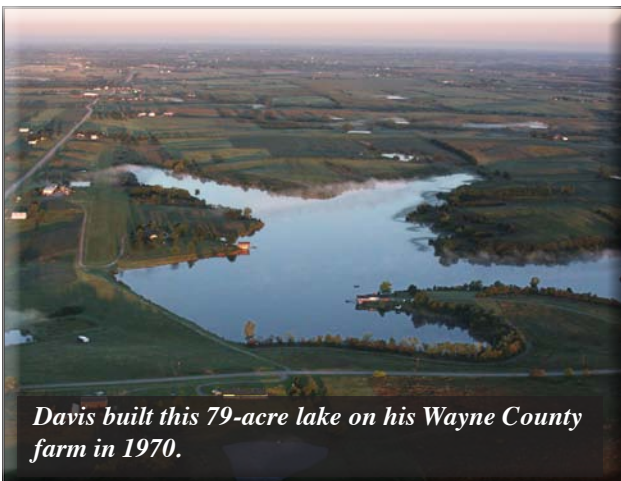
financial assistance from NRCS, he built terraces, ponds and grassed waterways. He installed masonry rip rap in the lake to protect against bank erosion, and planted hay grasses and used conservation tillage above the lake to reduce soil loss and runoff.

The result was clean water.

“The lake has four-foot visibility and wall-eyes flourish,” said Davis. “We use it for swimming, waterskiing, and fishing. In the summer I’ll land my float plane on it and use it as a runway. This lake has given us 38 years of enjoyment and we are looking forward to more.”

Mark Fehseke, NRCS district conservationist in Corydon, says the Davis lake is helping others, too. “Conservation practices on farmland aid farmers and public alike,” said Fehseke. “Well constructed conservation structures protect water quality, keep soil in

Davis had his lake, but he wasn’t done. He said his dream lake had clean, clear water: so Davis spent the next few years installing conservation practices around the lake to protect it. With key advice, design work and



*Davis built this 79-acre lake on his Wayne County farm in 1970.*

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place and reduce pollution entering our lakes and streams. That benefits everybody. This is especially true in southern Iowa where our drinking water comes from Rathbun Lake.”

Rathbun Lake is a manmade lake on the Chariton River. It provides drinking water to 70,000 residents of Iowa and Missouri. The Davis lake is in the Rathbun Watershed.

“Protecting the water entering Rathbun Lake is a priority for everyone in Wayne County,” said Fehseke. “Working with people like Benny Davis on conservation practices is a key to keeping our quality drinking water.”

NRCS and Davis have a long history of working together on his farm projects and on structures Davis built for others as a soil conservation contractor.

Davis owned an earth moving construction

company from 1959 to 1999. He built hundreds of NRCS-designed conservation structures for others in and around Wayne County.

Fehseke appreciates Davis’ lifetime of conservation work.

“People like Benny Davis are key to saving soil and making our environment better,” said Fehseke. “Over the years, he made many land improvements. As a farmer, those individual improvements combined to make a clean water lake his family still enjoys. As a soil conservation contractor, he helped scores of farmers build many soil saving structures. The end result is a countryside dotted with his conservation work that promises all of us environmental benefits for decades to come.”

*Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist  
USDA-NRCS, Des Moines  
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*Davis and Carl Joy, an NRCS soil conservation technician, stand on a terrace designed to protect the lake in the background.*

*Helping People Help the Land*

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